DAYS OF HIT HOT HITS

JEETENDRA, YESTERDAYS JUBILEE KING REVISITED

Never mind the critics who billed him a non-actor.

For a large part of the 1960s, '70s and '80s, Jeetendra ruled the box office with a blizzard of hits, from *Farz* in 1967 to the series of K.Raghavendra Rao-K. Bappaiah-Dasari Narayana Rao extravaganzas from the South which made waves even during the Rajesh Khanna-Amitabh Bachchan era.

Today, the affable star leads a semi-retired life, meeting up with his chums Rakesh Roshan, Sujit Kumar, Prem Chopra and Rishi Kapoor for workouts and drinks in the evening.

Fifty-plus, Jeetendra could well make a comeback any day now. If that happens, he holds a unique record.

You haven't acted in a commercial in so many years now. Was that a conscious decision?

I've done many films shot for the sets anywhere from Bihar to Andhra Pradesh. I shot for *Dharti Kahe Pukar Ke* in a village called Maner in Bihar. I remember in Patna, in the middle of the night some college boys demanded to meet me. To wake up a guy from his sleep was a rather extreme way of showing love.

So you've decided to stay away from the camera by choice?

Not exactly. In reality, the way I look, I can't play the romantic hero any more. Whatever I'm offered is pretty insignificant. You see, a while ago I did *Santaan* and *Udhar Ki Zindagi* in which I padded myself to look old and overweight. Both the films were massive hits in their original Telugu versions.

In my career, most of the Telugu remakes in Hindi have clicked. Unfortunately both *Santaan* and *Udhar Ki Zindagi* flopped. Maybe audiences couldn't accept me as an elderly man. Incidentally, I've done two films called *Santaan*. In one I was the *santaan*, in the other I played the father.

Do you intend to design projects keeping your ever-young image in mind?

I'd rather not TALK ABOUT THE HEMA Malini chapter in my LIFE... I MIGHT HAVE created the impression THAT I WAS AVAILABLE

JAYESH SHETH

means there's always an audience for something different. Heroes and heroines running around the trees just won't click anymore.

How did you manage to be in so many successful films during your heyday?

See, I always went for the subject and I liked to work in a disciplined atmosphere. I don't like to work at odd hours. If you want me to come at 9.30 in the morning, then please let me go at 6 in the evening, so I can have some time for myself. I can't start work at noon and go on till late in the night.

That's why I went over to the South to do all those

films in the '70s and '80s. Their working style suited me as much as I suited them. Can you imagine, from 1976 onwards I did 60 films in the South in 11 years!

But working in the South must have taken its toll on your family life.

Believe me, nothing is more valuable than your family life. But then this whole game of stardom is that of extremes. It's like riding a tiger. Either you take all the pain and stress that comes with stardom, or you don't get anything at all. I was doing the work of four or five top South heroes single-handedly. I was doing all the Hindi remakes of Telugu films featuring Nageshwara Rao*ji*, Krishna, Shobhan Babu and Krishnam Raju. *Main akela unke* remakes *karta tha*. Eventually fatigue *to aanee hi thi*.

Not all these remakes were quality conscious.

That's bound to happen if you make carbon copies of Telugu hits in 35 days. I had to think about running my family kitchen. But I lost Rs 1.5 crores in one week with the release of *Deedar-e-Yaar*. And to think that I set up my production house only for the sake of my father and brother.

Well whatever you may have lost in investments is more than compensated by your daughter.

Oh my god! You can't imagine how proud I am of Ekta. I've done what any householder has to do for his family. But what Ekta is doing is unbelievable. She works so hard and she enjoys her work. There's a saying that luck favours only the brave. Ekta showed her guts by venturing into the TV industry. And she started out so very young.

Just like you?

Yes, I started as a junior artiste when I was 18. *Geet Gaaya Pattharon Ne*, my first film as a hero, was released when I was 21. I was shooting as a junior artiste for Shantaram*ji's Sehra* in Bikaner, when he yelled at me, "Send this boy back to Bombay. He's an indisciplined fellow."

At 17 or 18, *aisa hota hai na?* I phoned my father to complain. Instead of consoling me, he also hollered at me, *"Aake ghar baith ja. Padhai to ki nahin, ab* acting *mein bhi tu nikamma nikla!"* I felt awful. The next morning, I woke up at 4 a.m. and waited outside Shantaram*ji's* room. He saw my weepy face and burst into laughter.

So you were allowed to continue in *Sehra*?

Yes, I even played the heroine Sandhya*ji's* duplicate in *Sehra*. Those days, they didn't have stunt performers. She had to jump over a camel. I got into her costume and took the jump. *Josh tha, hosh tha.*

Pot pourri with Sridevi

Since I lived in Girgaum, I could speak Marathi fluently. Shantaram*ji* was always impressed by the fact that a Punjabi boy could speak Marathi so well.

Rajesh Khanna was my school friend. He had plenty of acting experience on stage while I had none. So one day, before my screen test, he helped me out with the dialogue. I presumed I would get to speak the dialogue I had memorised. Instead I was asked to speak high-flown Sanskritised dialogue from Shantaram*ji's Stree*. I thought I was finished. I screamed out the lines out of sheer nervousness. But Shantaram*ji* cooled me down. Then I was okay.

There was a gap of three years between *Geet*

Heroes and heroines DANCING AROUND the trees won't CLICK ANYMORE

***Gaaya Pattharon Ne* and *Boond Jo Ban Gayee Moti*, your next film with V. Shantaram.**

Yes, that was because I was under an exclusive contract with Shantaram*ji*. I wasn't allowed to work outside. In the meanwhile, Sanjay Khan became extremely popular. He was really going strong then. After *Boond Jo Ban Gayee Moti*, Shantaram*ji* released me from my contract.

At that time, a Tamil film that was to be remade was shown to several actors in Mumbai. They finally came to me because everyone else including Shashi Kapoor and Manoj Kumar had refused. It was considered a stunt film in those days. Ultimately that film became the biggest hit of my life.

You mean *Farz*?

That's right. It was the second turning-point in my career after my launch in *Geet Gaaya Pattharon Ne*. *Farz* also clicked because of good music. Laxmikant-Pyarelal were raring to go, just like me.

Did you invent those wacky dance steps in *Mast baharon ka main aashiq*?

No no, I'm a total *tota*. I'm a good learner. I needed a choreographer. Dance master Hiralal taught me all the steps. For every song, I would rehearse for a week. We rehearsed day and night in Ooty. And you know something? *Farz* flopped in the first 10 weeks.

Those days, if the collection in a theatre went to Rs 30,000 a week, a film would continue showing. To keep the collections steady at one theatre in Mumbai, I would spend Rs 2,000 from my own pocket every week. Eventually *Farz* became a nationwide hit. Today my son Tusshar is making his debut with the daughter of my *Farz* heroine, Babita*ji*.

Which film-makers did you particularly enjoy working with?

L.V. Prasad, Gulzar and Hrithik Roshan's grandfather J. Om Prakash. I especially liked working with the Southern directors, they had no pretensions.

How did you think of doing films with Gulzar *saab*?

My wife Shobha and I had gone to Bangalore. There we saw *Anand*. We loved the film and Rajesh Khanna's performance. We both felt that the writing was the film's strongest point. We found out it was by Gulzar.

When we met, we took an instant liking for each other. Back then we were neighbours. We would spend an hour every morning together, having tea. And I suggested that Gulzar should make a film for me.

He made you look like him in *Parichay* and *Khushboo*.

(Laughs) We used to laugh about that.

Gulzar *saab* told me when he narrated *Parichay* to you, you rejected it. But when Raakhee *didi* narrated it, you excitedly accepted the film.

I don't remember this at all. But Gulzar's way of narrating a script is very cut and dried. Maybe that's why I didn't warm up to his narration.

From Gulzar's false moustache to those wigs in the South, must have been a culture shock for you.

Yeh wig *waali baat meri samajh mein nahin aayee*. Why did K. Raghavendra Rao make me wear a wig in *Himmatwalla*? Another hero who has much less hair worked with him recently... but wasn't made to wear a wig at all. Maybe, he wanted to make me look different. Once the wigged look clicked in *Himmatwalla*, all the other directors in the South insisted on it.

Once the wigged LOOK CLICKED IN *Himmatwalla*, all the OTHER DIRECTORS IN the South insisted on it

All the heroines—from Rajshree and Mumtaz to Hema Malini and Sridevi—were really fond of you, weren't they?

My first heroine Rajshree was a very strong influence on me. She made me lose my inhibitions, and also my fear of her father Shantaram*ji*. She would drop in at the small house that I stayed in, she'd take me out to movies. Rekha is another dear friend. We don't meet for ages. But when we do meet, it's just like the good old times.

Did you actually propose to Hema Malini?

I'd rather not talk about that chapter in my life. Her kids have grown up and so have mine. To talk about this now would be very awkward and embarrassing.

But admit it, you were quite a ladies' man.

I don't know what that means. But I'll tell you one thing. All unmarried girls want to hook an eligible bachelor. Every girl wants to settle down with a good man.

Now it's up to the man to fob off unwanted attention and let the girls know that he isn't available. I erred on that count. I might have created the impression that I was available. But in actual fact, Shobha was with me right since *Sehra*.

What do you feel about your career?

I'm not satisfied. I see that look in my daughter Ekta's eyes. She wants me to do something. I'm planning a film with myself. I want to make Ekta proud of me.

Subhash K. Jha